

# JEWISH PROFESSIONALS HIT THE SHMOOZE BUTTON

**Talking shop at shul helps entrepreneurs  
build and sustain thriving businesses**

by **ELYSE GLICKMAN**

**F**orget the gold watch for 50 years of service at one firm. For many baby boomers and Gen X-ers, starting one's own business has become more of a necessity than an alternative career path. As a result, professional networking groups have sprung up throughout the United States to help their members adjust to this new normal.

In 2005, Conejo Valley residents and emergent business owners Julie Marcus and Julie Perris became part of this movement when they founded JNET, a Jewish professional networking organization in which members support each other's businesses. At monthly meetings, members build relationships, share information about the products and services they provide, and offer testimonials for fellow members whose services they've used.

Marcus' and Perris' vision has since expanded from the Conejo Valley to chapters throughout the city and Valley. JNET has a diverse mix of members, in fields ranging from real estate, medicine, finance and technology to jewelers and auto mechanics. Although members join a specific chapter, they are encouraged to attend meetings of other chapters as well as multichapter mixers in order to get to meet as many people as possible throughout the organization.

Chapter meetings typically consist of a couple of featured members giving 10-minute presentations about their businesses; 30-second introductions by all attendees; networking tips; and the opportunity to nosh, *kibitz*, exchange business cards and get better acquainted. There are also occasional small-group get-togethers, called JNET Connect.

According to JNET Chairwoman

Jackie Mendelson, Marcus (owner of a contractor referral service) and Perris (owner of a printing company) believed that the best way to build a strong, stable organization was to affiliate with a local synagogue, so they selected Temple Beth Haverim as the first host location.

The group they founded remained small until 2010, when member Frank Tessel took over as board chairman, with the intention of getting more chapters established. He and his executive board spearheaded a growth campaign, encouraging members to form other chapters in their neighborhoods. The organization has since

professionally rewarding, but also deeply meaningful on a personal and social level.

"The heart and soul of our organization is at the various temples," she said. "All of our activities are developed in the chapters' meetings, which are shared with the entire membership using word of mouth, email, social media and our website."

Attorney Lisa Aminnia, who joined JNET two years ago and is the public relations officer for the Woodland Hills chapter, said the big draw for her was the notion of Jews helping Jews.

"The community at the meetings

"There is a certain innate warmth and camaraderie at JNET, doing business with those who share my Jewish culture and values."

Gail Meyer, operator of a business that helps senior citizens relocate from one residence to another, has been with JNET almost since its inception. "I use my JNET connections to refer members to other members," she said. "It keeps me in the thick of the Jewish community."

Although current members range in age from 35 to 60 years old, Mendelson hopes to attract more young professionals in the coming year. To facilitate this, JNET will be collabo-

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grown from a base of about a dozen members in the original chapter to 400 members throughout 10 chapters today — with plans to introduce an 11th this month — all of which meet in temples.

The largest chapter is based in Thousand Oaks and meets at Temple Etz Chaim, according to Mendelson, owner of ArabicaDabra Coffee Co. LLC, who originally joined the West Hills chapter and then switched to the Tarzana chapter.

Mendelson said that networking in a Jewish environment is not just pro-

helped me establish personal connections that enable me to foster good relationships, essential in estate planning, my specialty," Aminnia said.

Like Aminnia, fellow lawyer Steven Mayer joined JNET in 2012 for the opportunity to develop and strengthen business relationships within the local Jewish community.

"I had just relocated my law practice to Encino and was looking for ways to network with other Valley business owners in a forum that was more welcoming than other professional organizations," Mayer said.

rating with Sinai Temple, known for its successful young-adult social programs, to establish a Westwood chapter.

Aminnia, who is on the younger end of JNET's current membership, welcomes this move. "Having younger people will bring a lot to JNET, because they're going to be developing and running businesses for the next 20, 30 or 40 years," Aminnia said. And, she added, "Young members will benefit from the experiences of the older members and deepen their bonds in their communities." [7]